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Room 800

320 North Clark Street

Chicago, Illinois 60610

(312) 744-3200

THEURER/WRIGLEY HOUSE

Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks



The Theurer/Wrigley House.
(Alan Hess, photographer)

THEURER/WRIGLEY HOUSE

2466 Lakeview Avenue

Richard E. Schmidt, architect

Completed in 1896

The Theurer/Wrigley House is an early design by Richard E. Schmidt and, possibly, Hugh M. Garden, two architects who were part of the Prairie school movement in the early years of the twentieth century, but whose earliest work was in a more traditional mode. The only large freestanding house remaining on Lakeview Avenue, it was built for a successful brewer. Joseph Theurer was one of a number of men who became wealthy in Chicago at the end of the nineteenth century by producing beer, and one of two such men who commissioned Richard Schmidt to design houses for them on the city's North Side. The Theurer/Wrigley House was built in Lake View at a time when the area was rapidly changing from a rural and suburban area to a well-developed part of the city of Chicago. The house, therefore, is important in the geographic, social, and cultural history of the city, as well as being an interesting example of the beginnings of the long and prolific architectural partnership of Schmidt and Garden.

The Neighborhood

The Town of Lake View was organized in 1854 and annexed to the City of Chicago in 1889. Its boundaries were Fullerton Avenue, the North Branch of the Chicago River, Devon and Western avenues, and Lake Michigan. Settlement of the area had begun in 1837, and through the 1840s people of German, Swiss, and Luxembourg origins had settled there. West of Halsted Street, small farms were established and the area developed into a major truck-farming region. During the 1860s, Lake View was subdivided by developers into suburban estates. The area became more desirable after the construction in 1854 of Lake View House, a resort hotel that appealed to the affluent residents of central Chicago. The first major transportation artery, the Lake View Plank Road (later named Evanston Avenue and then renamed Broadway), was laid in 1855, and train service to the western part of Lake View began in 1856 and along the eastern portion in 1870. As roads were improved, particularly after Lake View was annexed to Chicago, the agricultural and suburban character of the area began to change. Small factories were built near the river. Both the farms in the western portion of the community and the estates in the eastern portion gave way to typical city building lots twenty-five feet in width and around one hundred feet in length, with some larger fifty-foot lots. The area closer to the lake, however, remained an area of greater affluence than the western part.

The House

Joseph Theurer chose to build his new house in the Lake View area. He purchased a large and somewhat irregularly-shaped lot at the corner of Lakeview Avenue and Arlington Place, across the street from Lincoln Park. Theurer was of German origin, as were many of the residents of that area. He was born in Philadelphia in 1852 and came to Chicago at the age of 17 to learn the brewing business. The large influx of Germans to the city after 1848 had provided an expanding market for beer. In 1860, fourteen breweries were operating in Chicago; by 1890, there were thirty-four. Though Chicago was the nation's sixth largest producer of beer, it ranked next to the top in consumption: 2,800,000 barrels drunk in a year, exceeded only by New York City's 5,000,000 barrels. Theurer was entering a promising business, and from 1869 until the fall of 1871, he apprenticed himself to Adam Baierle and K. G. Schmidt, owners of the Schmidt Brewery. The Chicago Fire in October of 1871 interrupted Theurer's career in Chicago. He returned to Philadelphia but a year later was back in Chicago. During the next four years, he worked at several breweries, including that of Frederick Wacker. Wacker was a German immigrant who had left Germany in 1848. His picturesque wood frame house was built in 1874, modeled after a Swiss chalet, in what was then called North Town but is now known as the Old Town Triangle. (The Old Town Triangle District was designated a Chicago Landmark on September 28, 1977.) Theurer left Wacker's employ and returned to Philadelphia for several years but in 1880 he was back in Chicago as a permanent resident.

In that year, Theurer became vice-president of the Peter Schoenhofen Brewing Company and married Schoenhofen's daughter Emma. Schoenhofen had come to America from Prussia in 1851 and opened his brewery in 1860. Originally located at Twelfth and Jefferson streets, the brewery moved to Eighteenth and Canalport in 1862. After Schoenhofen's death in 1893, Theurer became president of the brewery and remained in that position until his own death in 1913.

Theurer was a popular and respected member of the city's German-American community. He was involved in various clubs and societies, and served as an officer of the American Brewers' Association. In 1895, Theurer, then living at Indiana Avenue and Eighteenth Street near the Schoenhofen Brewery, decided to build a house on the increasingly fashionable North Side. He chose as his architect Richard E. Schmidt. Plans for the house were drawn up in 1895, construction began in 1896, and the Theurer family moved into the house in 1897.

The three-story house is an impressive and sophisticated residence of brick, stone, and terra cotta, with copper and wrought-iron trim. The house is a rectangular block with two projecting two-story bays, one on the east and one on the south side. The bay on the east side has a small open porch on the second floor. Off the southwest corner of the house is a round one-story conservatory. The main entrance is on the south side of the house, under a wide entrance porch at the top of a flight of stairs. Four Ionic columns support the south side of the porch; two piers stand at the east end. (A sun porch with removable windows was built above the entrance porch at a later date.) A large arched porte-cochere is located on the north side of the house. A three-story coach house stands behind the house at the northwest corner of the property.

The east side of the house, on Lakeview Avenue, faces Lincoln Park. The porte-cochere appears on the right side of the photograph.
(Alan Hess, photographer)





The variety of materials and ornament which give the Theurer/Wrigley House its impressive character is seen clearly on the south side of the building. The basic cubic form is offset by the projecting bay, the conservatory, and the entrance porch. The combination of brick, terra cotta, copper, glass, and wrought iron produces a pleasing visual effect. (Barbara Crane, photographer)

The architecture of the late Italian Renaissance was the basis for the massing of Theurer's residence, although its ornament derives from Baroque architecture. The walls of the three main floors are of orange brick with a smooth grey stone used on the base and front stairs. Terra cotta, in its natural orange color, is used extensively: in long narrow bands to form quoins around all the corners of the structure, as frames for the windows, and as a frieze and pediment above the entrance porch. Above each first-floor window is a baroque swag, a scroll bracket, and a decorative lintel. The second-floor windows are treated more simply. The smaller windows of the third floor are framed with smooth bands of terra cotta onto which rosettes were applied. Between these windows are wide swags arranged over circular medallions with shields. Several bands of molding top the structure, and brackets support the projecting cornice. Further terra-cotta ornament is found above the windows in the bays on the east and south facades.

The richly textured effect of the terra-cotta ornament is further enhanced by the contrasting colors of the various materials used on the house as a whole. In addition to the grey of the base and the orange of the walls, the house has fine black wrought-iron trim. Wrought-iron screens cover the windows of the high basement. The banister of the

front steps and the three fences between the columns of the front porch are elaborately designed as is the railing on the small second-floor porch. Each of the arches of the porte-cochere has an iron lantern supported by wrought-iron brackets.

The blue-green of oxidized copper also adds color to the house. The roof, gutters, and downspouts are copper, as are the mullions and cap of the conical roof over the conservatory. The colors of these materials produce a particularly pleasing effect. The contrast between them and the fine detailing in terra cotta give the house an elegant and imposing character.

The house is completely fireproof with steel beams and tiled partitions between rooms. On the first floor, in addition to the conservatory with its tile floor, there are a number of large rooms, including a reception hall and grand staircase, both panelled in dark wood. A small breakfast room with a lovely painted ceiling is also on the first floor. Bedrooms and sitting rooms are located on the second floor. Servants' rooms and a ballroom overlooking the park are on the third floor.

The house overlooks the north lagoon in Lincoln Park which is directly across the street. The park provides a large open setting for the house. Located at the eastern end of

Arlington Place, a street lined with an impressive assortment of turn-of-the-century houses and small attractive front gardens, the Theurer/Wrigley House serves as an anchor for the whole block and connects the street with Lincoln Park. Although larger than the other houses and set off by an expanse of lawn, the house fits perfectly with the architecture and mood of Arlington Place and serves as a distinct contrast to the modern highrises along the western edge of the park.

Theurer must have been pleased with his house and its architect because in 1902 he commissioned Schmidt and Garden to design a new powerhouse and storage building for the Schoenhofen Brewery. Nevertheless, Theurer and his family lived in their house on Lakeview for only fourteen years. In 1911, they sold the house to William Wrigley, Jr. (1861-1932), who was then making his fortune in the manufacture of chewing gum. Wrigley sold the house in the early 1920s to his son, Phillip K. Wrigley (1894-1977), who occupied it with his family for the remainder of the decade. Although they moved out of the house, the family continued to own the property and provided a caretaker in residence to maintain it.



The conservatory at the southwest corner of the house is one of the finest features of the house.
(Barbara Crane, photographer)

The Architects

Although Richard Ernest Schmidt, architect of record for the Theurer/Wrigley House, and Hugh Mackie Garden did not formally become partners until 1906, they had been working together since about 1896. Schmidt was born in Germany in 1865 and was brought to Chicago the following year. Educated in the city's public schools and for a short time at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he began practicing architecture in Chicago in 1887. Hugh Garden was born in Toronto in 1873 and moved to Minneapolis in 1887. There he became an apprentice to the

architect William Channing Whitney. Several years later he moved to Chicago and worked for various architectural offices, including those of Flanders and Zimmerman, Henry Ives Cobb, and Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge. In 1893, out of work because of the depression that year, he began to work as a freelance draftsman. This brought him into association with Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Richard Schmidt, who asked Garden to take charge of design in Schmidt's firm around 1895. It is therefore likely that Garden, or Schmidt and Garden together, designed the Theurer/Wrigley House. The partnership lasted throughout their long lives (Schmidt died in 1958 and Garden in 1961). Schmidt was responsible for the business and administrative work while Garden did most of the design.

The Theurer/Wrigley House is not one of Schmidt and Garden's most widely known works although it is significant for its part in the history of their evolution as architects. Schmidt and Garden were part of the Prairie school, a group of architects whose work reflected ideas, particularly concerning residential architecture, first articulated by Frank Lloyd Wright. In 1902, Garden designed a house for Albert F. Madlener, another successful brewer. The Madlener House (4 West Burton Place; designated a Chicago Landmark on March 22, 1973) has been compared to an Italian Renaissance palace because of its strong, simple shape and the refinement of its proportions. Madlener House has the horizontal emphasis of Prairie style buildings.

The terra-cotta quoins and window frames are seen here near the small balcony on the east side of the house.
(Alan Hess, photographer)



The details of the house, however, are not derived from any historical style. The Theurer/Wrigley House is not a Prairie style house, but in its basic cubic form and in the treatment of the window framing, it has a definite relationship to the Madlener House. Schmidt and Garden did a number of buildings in the Prairie idiom including the Schoenhofen Brewery powerhouse, the Grommes and Ullrich Building at 108 West Illinois Street in 1901, and the Chapin and Gore Building at 63 East Adams Street in 1904. In 1906, they designed what is their largest and perhaps best-known work, the Montgomery Ward and Company Warehouse at West Chicago Avenue and the North Branch of the Chicago River.

As an example of the early work of Schmidt and Garden, the Theurer/Wrigley House possesses special architectural interest. The house is unique in the community and is a major visual feature of Lakeview Avenue. In the same year it was constructed, another well-to-do brewer of German origin, Francis J. Dewes, was building a house just a few blocks north of Theurer. The Dewes House (503 Wrightwood Avenue; designated a Chicago Landmark on June 12, 1974) has a lively baroque exterior, recalling the buildings that Dewes and his two architects, one German and the other Hungarian, had known in Europe. Both houses were built by men who made their fortunes in Chicago and had their houses designed to demonstrate their success. The Theurer/Wrigley House thus reflects several important aspects of life in late nineteenth-century Chicago.

The lanterns in the arches of the porte-cochere are supported by elegant wrought-iron brackets.
(Alan Hess, photographer)



(Cover photograph)

Detail of entrance porch of the Theurer/Wrigley House.
(Barbara Crane, photographer)

The Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks was established in 1968 by city ordinance, and was given the responsibility of recommending to the City Council that specific landmarks be preserved and protected by law. The ordinance states that the Commission, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, can recommend any area, building, structure, work of art, or other object that has sufficient historical, community, or aesthetic value. Once the City Council acts on the Commission's recommendation and designates a Chicago Landmark, the ordinance provides for the preservation, protection, enhancement, rehabilitation, and perpetuation of that landmark. The Commission assists by carefully reviewing all applications for building permits pertaining to designated Chicago Landmarks. This insures that any proposed alteration does not detract from those qualities that caused the landmark to be designated.

The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council only after extensive study. As part of this study, the Commission's staff prepare detailed documentation on each potential landmark. This public information brochure is a synopsis of various research materials compiled as part of the designation procedure.